

Saawariya is Hollywood's First Bollywood Film

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

Saawariya made history when it opened across India on Diwali, and not only because it represents the screen debuts of a new generation of Kapoors. This Bollywood movie about star-crossed lovers also opened at the same time in the United States and Canada, where it is running in more than 80 theaters with English subtitles. That's a *big* first.

Even more significantly for the future of Indian and American film, this movie was produced, in India, by one of Hollywood's major film and television studios, Sony Pictures Entertainment. Even so, it's pure Bollywood, with song and dance, Hindi dialogue, direction by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, and big co-stars, Salman Khan and Rani Mukherjee.

"India is one of the most exciting theatrical markets in the world right now, thanks to the size and interests of its audiences, the talent of its stars and filmmakers and the potential for growth in the future," Deborah Schindler, president of International Motion Picture Production for Sony,

Saawariya, which means "beloved," stars Ranbir Kapoor (left) and Sonam Kapoor (right).

tells SPAN. "So when we had a chance to meet Sanjay Leela Bhansali, to see his previous work, and to look at the script for *Saawariya*, we knew we wanted to work with him and make this film." In Hollywood, this decision by a studio to back a film or TV show—to fund, develop, produce and distribute it—is called "greenlighting," referring to the traffic signal light that means "go ahead."

"The greenlighting of a Hindi film by a major Hollywood studio is a momentous landmark for the Indian motion picture business," says Steve Elzer, a spokesman for Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group, a division of Sony. "This historic co-production encourages the integration of two of the world's biggest and dynamic film production communities and offers an excellent opportunity for the enormous talent in India to interact with a premiere Hollywood studio."

"It represents an exciting and historic opportunity to build a bridge between Hollywood and Bollywood," says Gareth Wigan, vice chairman of Columbia TriStar, who has been responsible for building Sony's local language business for the past decade and teams with Schindler in running the studio's new international film production division, created just this year. It's part of the globalization of the

movie business, on the creative side, not just in marketing and distribution as in the past. With the biggest movie industry and audience in the world, India is in a prime position to take advantage of this fast-moving development. Other Hollywood studios, Warner Bros. and Disney, also expect to have their first Indian productions in theaters within the next year.

